THE HISTORY OF FAMILY STRUCTURE IN AUSTRIA: SOURCES AND RESEARCH PROBLEMS

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The Council of Trent and the Counter-Reformation are of importance for research into the family in Catholic Europe. After the Counter-Reformation churches started to keep not only registers of births, marriages and deaths, but also the so-called *libri status animarum*.¹ It was intended in the first place that the parish priests should write down a list of all the people in their parishes at regular intervals, supplemented by comments on their behaviour, spiritual worthiness and financial standing, but the *libri status animarum* were not kept as diligently as the parish registers so that the *libri* vary greatly in different dioceses.

In Austria these church records seem to have been intended for secular as well as ecclesiastical purposes, but in the second half of the eighteenth century the first state censuses were introduced and by the 1850s the *libri status animarum* had lost practically all importance and were mostly discontinued. However, the state censuses are but rarely preserved so that the ecclesiastical records that do exist for the second half of the nineteenth, and even for the twentieth century, are of great interest.

Although large numbers of the *libri status animarum* were destroyed, some do still exist in Austrian parish and episcopal archives, but most remain unpublished and unknown to the outside world. There are important regional differences. In the province of Salzburg (formerly an ecclesiastical principality) they start early: two from 1569 and 1593 respectively, with a few from the 1620s. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries they are well kept, but there are none after 1800. On the other hand, in Upper Austria they are rare in the seventeenth century: a single one from 1638 and a small number for the end of the century; yet they become quite numerous in the eighteenth and are very common in the early part of the nineteenth century. In addition a number survive for the second half of the nineteenth and even for the first half of the twentieth century — in three instances after World War two.

Lower Austria is divided into two dioceses. In St Pölten *libri animarum* are quite common from the last quarter of the eighteenth until the middle of the nineteenth century and they are all conveniently centralised in the episcopal archives. In the eastern diocese they are rare, especially for Vienna, where they were probably destroyed during the 1939-45 war. In Styria they are not rare, but they are not, on the whole, well kept, whereas Carinthia can boast a very interesting series of *libri* for the year 1757, for several adjacent parishes, covering in area nearly a quarter of the diocese of Gurk. The eastern part of the Tyrol which belongs to the diocese of Salzburg has a number of *libri* but the western part together with the Vorarlberg has none.

The Austrian government censuses began in the reign of Maria Theresa (1740-80) and until 1857 were taken mainly for military purposes. This has the advantage that, at least in the early censuses, horses, cows and
oxen were enumerated alongside people so that, without using additional sources, households may be classified roughly according to wealth. Another advantage is that the Austrian censuses were carried out on the same lines throughout the Empire thus facilitating comparison between the states. But against this there are important disadvantages. Up to 1935 the original state enumerations were stored at the local offices; the central office received only summaries and where it did have the complete originals these were merely on loan and were returned to the local offices who regarded them as of little importance and too bulky to be kept. Therefore only big towns like Vienna, which had the available storage space or those communities which, for reasons of their own, wanted to keep their censuses, now still hold this valuable material. It should be added that between the years 1935 and 1961 the census lists were collected at a central office, but they were kept for only ten years, so for this period no census material whatsoever remains. However, a number of official enumerations did remain with the local councils and some of these have been preserved.

When we come to consider the libri status animarum we find that for the study of family structure they need to be used in conjunction with parish registers and where possible a family reconstitution of the parish should be carried out. Libri status animarum are particularly valuable where they exist for a number of consecutive or nearly consecutive years, for it should then be possible to study the life-cycle of persons and families, the impact of short-time economic fluctuations and change over time in the composition of the co-resident kin and non-kin groups in the household. Such series would also give additional interesting information: for example, people who had been classed as servants might turn out to be distant relatives, while illegitimate grandchildren might well be foster-children and the exchange of personnel between farms might indicate kin connections between farming families. Finally, where we do have a series of lists, there is the possibility of correcting errors, filling in omissions and of calculating correct ages, while there is always the chance that one or other book of the series may contain additional information that is relevant to all the others.

Whilst work on a series of libri status animarum can be very rewarding, it is also extremely difficult, both when it is carried out manually or when
it is prepared for the computer. This is one of the reasons why relatively little work has been done so far on these books. The other reason is that the *libri status animarum* were practically unknown until quite recently, but it is hoped that this will change during the next few years and that these magnificent sources for the history of family structure in Austria will be opened to a wider public.

**NOTES**

1. *Libri status animarum* have been referred to in *Local Population Studies* as listings of inhabitants.

**APPENDIX**

A preliminary list of the principal series of *libri status animarum*

1. *Grieskirchen*: several in the seventeenth century from 1638; a series from 1709 to 1870, but incomplete in the 1850s and 1860s. A big rural community.
2. *Rottenbach*: 1730-1824, 1836, 1849-1899. In addition several lists of taxes, ownerships, tithes, etc.
3. *St Leonhard am Forst*: 1737-1756.
4. *Ebensee*: 1779-1809; 1821-1892; incomplete in the 1820s and 1880s. A large industrialised parish.

Figure 2

Numbers as in appendix